Human Events *A Weekly Analysis for the American Citizen*

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A LETTER TO WINSTON CHURCHILL

from Josée Laval de Chambrun

Pierre Laval, three times Prime Minister of France before the war and head of its government during the German occupation, was executed on October 15, 1945. The following letter from his daughter, Countess de Chambrun, to Winston Churchill, was written on February 25, 1949, and has never before been published. It is in response to a charge made by Mr. Churchill on page 107 of his book, The Gathering Storm. For reasons of space some quotations in Countess de Chambrun's poignant letter have been contracted here, and one paragraph has been omitted. The letter will be published in full in Paris, following the appearance of this authorized translation, by Felix Morley.

I have hesitated a long time before writing this letter. I have hesitated even longer before addressing it to you. I was fearful of being presumptuous or indiscreet. But I have finally made up my mind because it has seemed to me that I could not suffer, without retort, that phrase in your Memoirs where you pass judgment on my father in terms which could be neither more eulogistic nor more harsh. You write:

> "Laval's later shameful record and fate must not obscure the fact of his personal force and capacity. He had a clear and intense view."

I am happy to read, under your name, this homage to the clairvoyance of my father. He had, indeed, foreseen for a long time the menace of this war which, as you say, was unnecessary. Moreover, I am pleased to recall that you have been, in this respect, equally farsighted.

If the text that I have before me is correct, you said, in the course of a visit that you made to Rome in January, 1927, to the correspondents of the Italian press:

> "Your movement has rendered a service to the entire world. . . . . It is [Fascist] Italy which has given us the necessary antidote for the Russian poison."

And today, twenty years later in your memory, you write, in regard to the policy that your country was following towards Italy:

> "France had much to worry about, and only very silly people, of whom there are extremely large numbers in every country, could ignore all this." [p. 182] "By estranging Italy they [the then leaders of the British Government] had upset the whole balance of Europe and gained nothing for Abyssinia." [p. 187]

My father had for a long time been expressing himself in terms similar to these of yours, and he had done better than make speeches or write books. At Rome [in 1935] he had signed the military accords which

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were designed to prevent Hitler from seizing Austria, thus rendering impossible "the war which was not unavoidable". It was by brutally reversing the policy inaugurated by these accords, it was by throwing Fascist Italy into the arms of Hitler Germany, that the Government of your country (Mr. Eden being then Minister of Foreign Affairs) hurled Europe into a war of which nobody, I think, will dare to say that it has advanced humanity and civilization by a single step.

But my father did not only do everything possible to stave off this war. He also saw coming events a good deal more clearly, and further ahead, than you realize. He foresaw that an Allied victory pushed to the stage of "unconditional surrender" would insure the advent of a gigantic Russia rather than the crushing of Germany. He foresaw that "unconditional surrender" would permit Communism to conquer all of Eastern Europe, while perhaps waiting for something better.

On November 9, 1943, he said, speaking to a conference of Mayors:

> "Germany and Russia partitioned Poland, and almost alone we entered the war, and we have lost it. Why? Because this war is not like other wars. It isn't a war for the defense of the land of our fathers. It isn't a war for the defense of our country. It is a war of passionate fanaticism, where ideologies are lined up against each other. I speak in a country old in the ways of liberty -- which it has momentarily lost but will find again one day that I hope will be soon -- and I affirm that we entered this world conflict for ideas which were not ours."

And on August 8, 1945, in his cell, he wrote these prophetic lines:

> "Henceforth, then, the greater part of Germany will be placed in the Soviet orbit, and Europe will be under a Russian hegemony. . . . Germany, with its regimentation, is politically prepared to receive the Soviet imprint . . . Therefore it is necessary to consider as a historical fact, formidable and unexpected by those who have prepared it, the installation of Communism in Europe. That is the supremely important outcome which should cause concern to those who have the heavy responsibilities of political leadership. In reconstituting German unity, a decision which for my part I wholly approve, the Big Three have permitted Stalin to win the game, that is to say, to win Germany for Communism after a more or less lengthy interval. It will come very quickly after the departure of the Allied armies of occupation. . . ."

Your country, Sir, is going to be forced to recognize, after some years of delay, the exactness of my father's prevision.

Mr. Liddell Hart, the celebrated military commentator, wrote of the Resistance Movement, in February, 1947:

> "At the time, the policy was adopted with great enthusiasm and little question. Once the German tide of conquest had spread over most of Europe, it seemed the obvious course to pursue, in the effort to loosen Hitler's grip. It was just the sort of course that appealed to Mr. Churchill's mind and temperament. . . . What were the results? Material damage that the guerrillas produced directly, and indirectly in the

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course of reprisals, caused much suffering among their own people, and ultimately became a handicap on recovery after liberation. But the heaviest handicap of all, and the most lasting one, was of a moral kind. The armed Resistance Movement attracted many 'bad hats'. It gave them license to indulge their vices and work off their grudges under the cloak of patriotism . . ."

Since then others have expressed themselves in like manner. You yourself, without openly going so far as to say "mea culpa", have not hesitated to manifest your disenchantment in stating how little the consequences of Allied victory have conformed to the hopes you placed upon it: "After all that we suffered and achieved, we find ourselves still confronted with problems and perils not less but far more formidable than those through which we have so narrowly made our way." [p. 17]

This new danger, to which you have to face up, appears to you so grave, and so pressing, that you did not hesitate on December 12, 1948, to give to our country this advice, which the French press published in enormous headlines: "A reconciliation with Germany would permit France to regain its place at the head of Europe."

Isn't it a little late, Sir, and are you well qualified to give us such an opinion? And is it not curious that a man whose political clairvoyance you yourself recognize should be reproached by you for his "shameful record"?

Following our defeat, my father -- having become the receiver of a bankruptcy he had done everything to avert -- evidently understood that he must obstinately defend the French population and patrimony, against the exigencies of the occupation, by an on-the-spot policy. And the documents brought to me from Nuremberg, these last three years, prove that the Germans were not completely duped by my father's intentions. But, in truth, are you acquainted with these documents? . . .

Have you read the Diary of Goebbels? You can find there the judgment which he formulated, November 17, 1943, on my father:

> "Petain and Laval have entered upon a policy of watchful waiting. Naturally both, from the depths of their being, are completely opposed to the Reich and to its interests."

Are you acquainted with the report of Sauckel to Hitler, from the Nuremberg archives, in which Sauckel declares that Pierre Laval, by refusing to surrender the French labor necessary for Germany, was personally responsible for the defeat of Stalingrad?

Finally, are you acquainted with the reports made to the German Government by Drs. Michel, Medicus, Hemmen, in which these men, who held important positions in Paris, express themselves about my father in completely disilllusioned terms? How then, under these conditions, can you speak of his "shameful record and fate"?

The word "shameful" is certainly ill chosen. His assassination will always remain a blot upon the record of the Provisional Government

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that ordered it. This shame reflects also on the British Government which, forgetful of the assistance my father so often accorded to your country, did nothing to prevent this judicial crime. Do you realize, Sir, that the soldiers of his execution squad wore English uniforms?

Yes, I repeat, how have you been able to speak of his "shameful record and fate"? Is this one of those banal phrases that you felt obliged to write in devotion to a fashion already outdated; or was it merely to qualify your eulogistic judgment on my father, which could be shocking to some people? No, I believe you are too independent and courageous to have obeyed such impulses.

There remains only one possible explanation and it is, I think, the right one. You characterize the conduct of my father as "shameful" because it was not placed at the service of Great Britain, because he was exclusively preoccupied by the interests of his own country.

Honor for a Frenchman, according to your definition, in these tragic years, was to be obedient to British orders. Shame was to struggle step-by-step, at Paris or at Vichy, so that France might continue to breathe and live.

No, Sir, you cannot be judge of the duty of the French. Each one of us was free to estimate that, according to his conscience and his responsibilities. Honor was not found only on the banks of the Thames nor in the folds of the Union Jack. As my father wrote, shortly before his death, honor is universal: "to defend the interest of one's country, wherever it is questioned, under whatever form it takes." . . .

You, Sir, possess an intransigeant and exclusive patriotism. That should help you to understand that a French statesman might have a patriotism as intransigeant and as exclusive as your own. You reproach my father for having "collaborated" with the Germans. But are you not the man who once said: "Darlan is the devil; that would not keep me from crawling miles on my knees, so that he would help England to win the war"? Two years previously my father, whose fate it was to have contact with Hitler, said: "I would go to see the devil if in doing so I could save French lives."

Will you permit me, Sir, to tell you -- paradoxical though it may seem -- that I find again in your courage, in your independence, in your obstinate and jealous patriotism, that true grandeur that I learned to recognize in watching my father live and act. In my presence, eminent men have often expressed regret that you never met him.

On these words I end this letter, certain that you will appreciate the emotions which have forced me to write to you. I beg you to find herein, Sir, the expression of my deepest consideration.

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Not Merely Gossip *A Supplement to* Human Events Vol. VI, No. 22

By Frank C. Hanighen June 1,1949

ADMINISTRATION STRATEGY: The mental health of the White House has appeared a bit delicate during the past week, what with Majority Leader Lucas on one day conceding that Congress will enact only a small fraction of the Truman program this session, and two days later the President, with a brave little smile, contending that Congress must stay and pass most of it. But a complete cure for all party ailments is promised at a Democratic powwow on June 12 in Des Moines. There the farm vote which won the famous victory will be admonished never to despair, much satisfying demagogy will be heard and presumably a general revival of Administration spirit will follow. Indeed, so exuberant is the Democratic National Committee that it proposes to designate Des Moines as the site of campaign headquarters in 1950. Finally, there will be much proud talk of the Brannan Plan.

It will be interesting to see how popular this project will be out in Iowa, now that Secretary Brannan has formally asked Congress (May 31) for powers to control production of a large number of agricultural products. Under a system of rigid marketing quotas, the Department of Agriculture could tell farmers how much of any particular crop or product they could sell. Sales in excess of a quota would be subject to a penalty tax. It is said that Brannan realizes full well that his celebrated plan, without strict enforcement of controls, would run into fabulous sums and would be permanently discredited. Months hence farm prices may reach such a low point that the farmers will meekly bow their necks to the bureaucratic yoke. But as rural sentiment has been running recently, the Brannan request for controls can hardly be pleasant music for the boys out on the prairies. At Des Moines, the Secretary will learn whether or not he has been premature.

While Administration politicos rush to Des Moines as if to the shrine of Lourdes, there are other bureaucrats who apparently prefer a quiet attitude of waiting, as they watch the descending graphs of commodities, business, employment, etc. Mr. Keyserling, for instance, who faces as difficult a problem as his fellow janissary, Mr. Brannan, remains undismayed. His group has withdrawn the Spence ("In Stalin's Footsteps") bill. Originally designed for an inflationary situation, the Keyserling planners must refurbish it for a time of deflation. Some months hence an expected 5 to 8 million unemployed will presumably provide the political atmospheric pressure necessary for open requests for controls. Then, believe it or not, they plan to renew the demand for government factories. It may seem incredible to the average reasoning human being that any argument for more factories could be made persuasively at a time when existing plants are emptying. But the nimble brains are hard at work to produce an attractive formula; and one may remain confident that, when finished, its form and content indeed a wonder will be. Perhaps the "wait-and-plan" strategy of these economists will pay more party dividends than the war drums of the politicians.

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EISLER: Gerhart Eisler is apparently set to be a big figure in the Soviet zone of Germany, and we have lost a trick in our psychological warfare. This outcome should have been foreseen by many Americans who brushed off the whole Eisler affair as of no importance. That affair, particularly in its Bow Street phase, inspired a great deal of varied interpretation and comment. We liked best the legal comments of Senator Ferguson (in the Senate, May 27) who seemed to have briefed himself thoroughly before making a speech which got precious little attention in the press.

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"Many people", remarked Ferguson, "will say 'good riddance'. I cannot agree. Eisler was convicted of a crime, sentence was imposed and the proper administration of justice requires that he should serve the term imposed by the sentence. . . . I say that the United States would follow a man if he were not a Communist; so, why should we not follow a man who is a Communist? . . . Eisler, or anyone else, should be accorded equal treatment under the law."

As for the question of the soundness of the British court decision in freeing the Communist, Ferguson answers in the negative. He points out that our treaty with Britain provides for extradition in cases of perjury or subordination of perjury; and he reminds us that in England as in the U.S. there are "kindred statutes" which legitimately widen the scope of the law. "I am sure", he says, "that the word 'perjury' was used in the treaty in its generic sense. Therefore, it must include kindred offenses. . . . Every element involved in a perjury charge, under the words of the treaty, was alleged and proved against Eisler, on the charge of false swearing in connection with his exit permit. A fair construction of the law should then have included it within the treaty provision."

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HOOVER: We learn that farm groups are rapidly getting behind the Hoover plan to reorganize the Executive agencies of the Government and to take $5 billion worth of inefficiency off the back of the taxpayer. This news revives to a certain extent hopes of economy advocates in Washington -- hopes which have languished as Congress continues to show no earnest intention to reduce the bureaucracy. At first, the Citizens Committee to push the Hoover plan, headed by President Robert L. Johnson of Temple University, seemed like just another worthy but vain effort. However, developments, such as the above news about the farm groups, suggest that the Johnson drive may be stirring up far more support out in the country than Washington observers anticipated. Mr. Hoover yesterday gave further impetus to economy sentiment by a statement to the U.S. News. He said that savings to taxpayers, which he had previously estimated at a possible $3 billion, might even reach $4 or $5 billion, if the Executive were properly reorganized with 10 per cent fewer civilian employees. It is noticeable that Mr. Hoover is making more forcible claims in behalf of reorganization and economy since the filing of his final report to the President. Because of the influence of New Deal elements on the Commission, the report was limited to less specific promises.

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CHINA: Hugger-mugger is the best word to describe the picture which we receive of State Department plans for recognizing the Red Government of China. Needless to say, the Far Eastern Division, which has earned the sobriquet of "The Red Cell", is not exactly averse to the idea. But the Department heads fear a strong reaction from the Senate, should they, without any preparation, announce recognition. Accordingly one line of approach considered is to let Britain and several Latin American countries grant recognition -- in short, figuratively to run interference for the Department. Britain is reportedly seeking a modus vivendi with the Reds, under which the Union Jack would still fly over the rich port of Hong Kong. (Some economists estimate that Hong Kong is worth more, in terms of the exchange which it brings in, than Malaya.) Meanwhile various American commercial and banking interests desirous of protecting their investments would put pressure on prominent GOP Members of Congress to withhold their fire. It is no secret that such interests -- short-sightedly -- have for many months taken the view that they "can do business with Mao Tse-tung". It might be well, however, to realize that the State Department at present is thinking only in terms of de facto recognition, with retention

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of de jure recognition for the Chiang regime in Formosa. Thus, it is calculated, the United States could prevent Moscow from attaining its cherished aim of having a puppet in China's seat on the Security Council of the United Nations.

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JOHNSTON: That super-salesman, Mr. Eric Johnston, is out with his brief case offering a new brand of goods. Collier's (May 21) has an article by the former head of the Chamber of Commerce in which he advocates not something "bold, new" (for salesmen must vary their adjectives), but something "daring". Well, it's not so electrifying as all that. It is simply part of Point Four of the Inaugural program -- a Government guarantee for loans to "backward nations". Isn't it interesting that Mr. Johnston's fertile brain produced such a novelty just at the time when the Government's publicity agents were puffing and blowing to arrange the entrance of Point Four proposals on the national scene?

When first we read the Johnston piece, we were not sure that his sales talk was too well advised. For instance, a commercial traveller does not usually begin by admitting to the customer that his previous sales talk contained a great deal of plain and intentional bunk. Mr. Johnston had been boosting, two years ago, the proposal for ECA. He admits in his first paragraph, "We sold ourselves the Economic Co-operation Administration on the theory it would tidy up the disordered economic household of Western Europe in four years flat. . . . That's the way we were talking, but most of us didn't think that way [emphasis ours]. We knew deep down inside that ECA at its very best was an uncertain gamble . . . Today we are beginning freely to admit it." Well, well! We would imagine that the customer (reading Collier's) would take a rather critical view of Mr. Johnston's new "daring" product -- guarantee of foreign investments -- in view of the Johnston admission.

But, Mr. Johnston (he's had long experience with his bag of samples) like Mr. Lilienthal had thought of that. Mr. Lilienthal took the missing bottle of uranium in his stride and magnanimously admitted a "human error". Breast-beating and grovelling before the man on the other side of the counter is better tactics than covering up. So, Johnston admits he wasn't deluded by what he had been saying. And, after such a confession, there's nothing like the "shock treatment" for making the customer receptive again. Thus, Johnston absolutely guarantees that the new product will be a "shocking departure from tradition". We must admit that an appeal to "get away from tradition" is sure-fire stuff for any sucker.

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INDEPENDENT: M. Armand Petitjean from Paris dropped in to see us the other day. He is Editor of the new French magazine Oedipe, the best of French periodicals to emerge from a post-war publication situation in France which has produced little of merit. We recall M. Petitjean's by-line in that extraordinary pre-war weekly La Fleche, edited by the no less extraordinary Gaston Bergery. M. Bergery was the enfant terrible of French politics and journalism in the Thirties and his Fleche upheld the great French tradition of individualism and independence. Once a French Deputy, a subscriber to HUMAN EVENTS, paid us the greatest compliment which could come from a Gaul by praising our publication because it was "indépendent".

To get back to M. Petitjean -- who certainly carries on this great French tradition in Oedipe -- we found him very interested in the American attitude towards European Federation. Somewhat impatient with the lack of progress in the new Political Council of Europe, the first step towards federation, he bewailed the lack of funds among the French organization supporting the idea of a United States of Europe. We suggested that perhaps, in our profusion of funds under ECA, we should appropriate a few dollars to help those organizations. Since various U. S. publications, such as the New York Times and Time in effect enjoy subsidies for European distribution, might it not be better to spend this money assisting a movement of such sound constructive purpose and wide American support?

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Book Events

The Ethics of Ambiguity, by Simone de Beauvoir; translated by Bernard Frechtman. New York: The Philosophical Library. $3.00.
Encounter With Nothingness, by Helmut Kuhn. Hinsdale, Illinois. Henry Regnery Company. $3.00. Reviewed by J. M. Lalley.

Mme. de Beauvoir is probably the foremost exponent, next to M. Sartre, of the French existentialist school, which derives very largely from Husserl and Heidegger, and is frankly atheistic. Her little treatise, however, seems to be an effort to refute those critics, such as the late Guido de Ruggiero, who have said that the ontological nihilism of this cult must lead to nihilism of morals. The question is of some importance, for it is now clear that existentialism in one guise or another will remain a potent philosophic influence throughout the remainder of our unhappy century. It has been interpreted as the final effort of modern man to reassert and defend his individuality against the universal collectivism that bids fair to extinguish it.

Life, as Mme. de Beauvoir assures us, has no real meaning beyond the recognition by the individual of his own existence; it is therefore devoid of all objective values. But in the very crisis that follows this discovery comes the realization of freedom; for then the individual, aware of his total subjectivity, may will his own values, and, having willed, may realize them in action. This freedom of existence must, however, be purchased at the price of being, which in the existentialist vocabulary means the desire to subsist under some absolute and eternal order of truth. Freedom, then, is defined as the lack of being, which delivers the individual from subservience to all values independent of himself. Once delivered he need no longer be slave to any doctrine, or cause, or ideology or State. The danger, of course, is that the individual may will no other value than himself. Thus he finds his freedom only to lose it in an egotistic pursuit of wealth or power, since these become objective values to which he must surrender his subjective autonomy. The only way, therefore, to preserve the lack of being in oneself is to will the being of others. By a kind of subjective fiat one establishes the existences and freedom of others and accordingly realizes these values in one's actions, resisting all indignities to others as an affront to oneself. Such is the existentialist substitute for the virtues of compassion and charity.

Mme. de Beauvoir's ethics must of course be distinguished from those of the Christian existentialism associated with the name of Soren Kierkegaarde and given clearest exposition by the late Miguel de Unamuno in The Tragic Sense of Life. Its central principle is the antagonism of reason and religious truth. The individual Christian, confronted with the fact of his existence and mortality becomes at the same time aware of his isolation from God and of his longing for eternity. The soul is thus brought to the point of crisis and despair, for in this situation the Christian perceives the meaninglessness of all rational proofs of God. Freedom therefore becomes possible only by means of a faith that does violence to the intellect. In Kierkegaard's existentialism was primarily a revolt against the metaphysical idealism of his day, which he sought to demolish in terms of its own dialectic, proving that all speculative theology must be pantheistic since it is impossible for the philosopher to detach himself from the created universe. But now, as Professor Kuhn shows, existentialism has retraced its own dialectical development and is seeking to reanchor itself in the very doctrines it began by repudiating. Mme. de Beauvoir's ethics of ambiguity are merely an irrational paraphrase of the rational ethics of Kant, for to "will the being of others" is a restatement of the categorical imperative, minus any logical necessity for it.

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